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ABSTRACT

This report assesses the image of vocational education through a review of several studies and projects concerned with that image. In the first section of the report, the three most recent studies that target the image of vocational education from the national perspectives of manufacturers, state legislators, and employers are abstracted. Along with these abstracts are extracts of two recent Gallup Polls that indicate something of the image of vocational education held by the American public as a whole. Following these glimpses of the national picture are summaries of two studies from the Southeast, one from Florida and one from Georgia, that provide a regional perspective of the image of vocational education. The Florida study concentrates on the business community, whereas the researchers for the Georgia study also sampled the impressions of students, parents, and educators. The second section of this report contains brief descriptions of the efforts of a Florida educational agency to maintain and enhance the image of vocational education in Florida. In this section, three projects that have resulted in an enhancement of the image of vocational education in other states (New York, Hawaii, and Alabama) are reported. The final section contains conclusions derived from the literature and recommendations to the State Board for Vocational Education for continuing and additional efforts that might be undertaken to enhance the public image of vocational-technical education in Florida. (Author/KC)

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ASSESSMENTS AND EFFORTS

A REPORT ON THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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March, 1987

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The first step in improving the quality of vocational training is, of course, improving the image. And the only solution to this challenge is the continuation of our efforts to set positive examples, demonstrate our role in the future of this economy and this country, and present a consistent and powerful message whenever the opportunity arises.

-- Alfred W. Pelletier
Chairman of the Board
of Directors
Mack Trucks, Inc.

INTRODUCTION

Assessing the Image

Although the literature of education in the 1970s and 1980s is replete with studies that touch upon the image of vocational education, there are few that concentrate on assessing that image. In the following pages, the three most recent studies that target the image of vocational education from the national perspectives of manufacturers, state legislators, and employers have been abstracted. Along with these abstracts are extracts of two recent Gallup Polls that indicate something of the image of vocational education held by the American public as a whole.

Following these glimpses of the national picture are summaries of two studies from the Southeast, one from Florida and one from Georgia, that provide a regional perspective of the image of vocational education. The Florida study concentrates on the business community, but the researchers for the Georgia study also sampled the impressions of students, parents, and educators.

Reporting the Efforts

The second section of this report contains brief descriptions of the efforts of the Division of Vocational, Adult, and Community Education and the Division of Community Colleges to maintain and enhance the image of vocational education in Florida.

Examples from Elsewhere

In this section, three projects that have resulted in an enhancement of the image of vocational education in other states are reported. In the first case, that of upstate New York, the image enhancement was an intended outcome of the activity. In the second case, that of Hawaii, the image enhancement was a byproduct of a teacher's attempt to keep his students abreast of the newest technologies in automobile mechanics. In the third case, that of Alabama, the image enhancement was an outcome of a program designed to help gifted and talented youth achieve sufficient earning power to continue their education.

The public relations campaign conducted in New York under the guidance of Communications Support Group, Inc., was a concerted effort on behalf of the vocational education community to improve the public image of vocational education among the general population of the Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga service area. This effort met with considerable success.

The introduction of a vocational education program for gifted students in Hawaii and Alabama, although not originally intended as a public relations effort, had the effect of improving the image of vocational education, especially among the "academic" faculties of the innovating schools.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The final section contains conclusions derived from the literature and recommendations to the State Board for Vocational Education for continuing and additional efforts that might be undertaken to further enhance the public image of vocational-technical education in Florida.

ASSESSING THE IMAGE

As Others See Vocational Education: A Survey of the National Association of Manufacturers

As stated in its introduction, "this study represents a joint effort of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and the National Center for Research in Vocational Education to assess the attitudes of employers toward vocational education." The project was sponsored by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education of the U.S. Department of Education. In particular, the researchers sought to elicit the views of the NAM respondents on the effectiveness of vocational education, and the collaborative activities between manufacturers and vocational education agencies. Suggestions for the improvement of vocational education were also compiled and analyzed.

In order to obtain the desired information, a stratified random sample of NAM member firms was selected to represent companies of varied size, industrial classification, and geographic region. Survey forms were sent to the selected participants in the summer of 1981. Survey forms were completed and returned to NAM by 775 firms (40 percent). Persons who completed the surveys included presidents or chief executive officers, vice-presidents for industrial relations, personnel managers, human resource directors, and employment and training managers.

The survey respondents represented a fairly even distribution in terms of numbers of employees in their companies. Thirty-three percent reported employing between 20 and 99 workers, 22 percent reported employing between 100 and 249 workers, 26 percent reported employing between 250 and 999 workers, and 16 percent reported employing more than 1000 workers. Only three percent reported employing fewer that twenty workers.

The geographic distribution of the respondents tended to be more reflective of the conditions in the Eastern regions of the United States. Forty-one percent of the respondents were from the Central & Northeastern states, 15 percent were from the Middle Atlantic states, and 10 percent were from South Atlantic states. Consequently, the results of the study are even more pertinent to the concerns of the Florida Council than they would be had the pattern of response followed the original intent of the research team in producing a more homogenous national distribution.

The following findings of the NAM study which relate to the issue of the image of vocational education are extracted from the executive summary and the statistical tables in the body of the text.

Opinions about Vocational Education

1. The most frequent grade awarded to secondary vocational education (on a scale of A, B, C, D, And Fail) by manufacturers was a "C."

   For postsecondary vocational education, the most frequent grade was a "B."

2. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that their company benefited from vocational education. Thirty-nine percent believed that vocational education lowered their company's training costs, and 60 percent said vocational education graduates need less training than other new employees in similar positions.

3. Most manufacturers, 85 percent, prefer hiring vocational graduates rather than nonvocational graduates (all else being equal) for a job requiring less than a four-year degree.

4. In general, those respondents whose companies are currently involved in joint activities with vocational education agencies grade the effectiveness of vocational education higher than those whose companies are not involved. Large companies tend to be more involved and more satisfied with vocational education than small companies.

What Vocational Education Should be Doing

1. Three-fourths of the responding manufacturers prefer that both employability skills training and job skills training be offered at the high school level. They see this as the most effective mode of preparing youth for work and prefer this option to offering only employability skills training or specific job skills training alone.

2. When considering suggestions for change in vocational education, manufacturers agreed that there is a need for more employability skills training at the high school level, for more course offerings at the postsecondary level, for increased employer involvement in the evaluation of vocational education, and for adults to have access to skills training for re-entry into the job market.

As Others See Vocational Education: A Survey of the National Conference of State Legislatures

As stated in its introduction, "this report presents the results of a survey assessing the attitudes of state legislators toward vocational education and about preferred federal-state roles respective to vocational education. The study was completed through the efforts of the National Council of State Legislatures (NCSL) with this analysis and report provided by the National Center for Research in Vocational Education."

The sample for the survey consisted of 209 state legislators. Included were all 75 current members and all 35 alternate members of the NCSL's education committee. The remaining 99 persons were selected at random from NCSL committee members at large.

Forty-five percent of the selected survey participants completed and returned their surveys to the NCSL. The respondents included state senators (45 percent), state representatives (46 percent), assemblypersons (3 percent), delegates (1 percent), and legislative staff members (4 percent). A random sample of approximately 20 percent of the nonrespondents was contacted by telephone and asked to respond to selected survey items. These responses were not significantly different from those derived from the mail survey.

Of those who responded, 61 percent were members of their home state's legislative education committee, 22 percent belonged to employment and training or labor committees, and 27 percent belonged to economic development committees. The geographical distribution of the respondents was fairly even with 31 percent coming from southern states, 29 percent from north central states, 27 percent from western states, and 13 percent from northeastern states.

The findings of the NCSL study relating to the image of vocational education are extracted from the executive summary.

Perceptions about Vocational Education

1. Legislators see vocational education as doing an "above average" job. The most frequent grade awarded to both secondary and postsecondary vocational education by the legislators was "B." However, the percentage of "A" grades given to postsecondary vocational education was twice that given to secondary vocational education.

2. The legislators thought that vocational education was performing especially well in teaching job skills, increasing awareness of career opportunities and technology, and teaching good work habits.

3. The areas within vocational education that legislators thought needed the greatest emphasis included involving employers in curriculum development and in the evaluation of vocational education.

Federal and State Roles in Vocational Education

1. Most of the respondents thought that the federal government should be involved in vocational education.

2. Slightly more than one-half of the respondents thought that if the federal government were to significantly decrease funds for vocational education, the states should attempt to replace the difference.

The Social Payoff for Occupationally Specific Training: The Employers' Point of View

Greater employee productivity and lower training costs resulted from hiring new employees with relevant school-provided vocational training, according to an employer survey conducted under a grant from the National

Institute of Education by researchers at Ohio State University working in conjuction with the Gallup Organization. For the study, Gallup interviewed 3,847 employers thoughout the United States. The collected data were then analyzed at the National Center for Research in Vocational Education to determine any benefits that accrue to employers when they hire new employees with vocational training.

Employers reported that new hires with relevant school-provided vocational training were significantly more productive than employees who lack such training. The productivity index was nine percent higher in the first two weeks and six to seven percent higher thereafter. Wage rates were also higher.

When those holding the same kind of job at the same firm were compared, the researchers found that new hires with relevant school-provided vocational training required about seven percent less on-the-job training than new hires who had not acquired school-provided vocational training. During the first three months, training cost reductions were equivalent to 7.5 percent of the output of a worker with two years of tenure. That cost reduction remains significantly greater than the increased starting wages a person with a relevant vocational background usually obtains, the researcher noted.

According to the study report, "the finding that new employees who have relevant school-provided vocational training are less costly to train (but not much more costly to employ) than the other employees without such training hired for the same job implies that there are hidden benefits of vocational education that are not being measured by traditional studies."

Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Polls

The 14th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward the Public Schools

More vocational classes, more practical instruction, and more emphasis on basics were the top three changes suggested by the public to improve the nation's schools, according to this 1982 poll. The poll was conducted for Phi Delta Kappa by the Gallup Organization, using a modified probability sample of the population of the United States. Personal in-home interviews were conducted with 1,557 adults (18 years of age or older) in May, 1982.

Those who said that curriculum changes were needed to improve the nation's schools were asked to suggest an area in which curriculum could be improved. Gallup reported suggestions in seventeen areas, but only three of these were suggested by more than ten percent of the respondents. Eleven percent suggested "more vocational classes." Fourteen percent suggested "more practical instruction." Twenty-six percent suggested "more attention to basics."

The 17th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward the Public Schools

Seventy-five percent of Americans favor requiring vocational training in high school for all students who do not plan to enroll in college, according to this 1985 poll. When this survey population was asked which courses should be required of high school students who do not plan to go to college, 75 percent named vocational training, placing it behind mathematics and English, but before history, business, computer training, and science. Eighty-five percent of the American public would require mathematics for students not planning to go to college, 81 percent would require English, 61 percent would require history/U.S. government, 60 percent would require business, 57 percent would require computer training, and 51 percent would require science courses.

The results of both polls indicate an awareness among the American public of the importance of the availability of vocational education in the nation's public schools.

A Study of the Attitudes of Employers Toward Hiring Graduates of Vocational Programs in Entry-Level Jobs

Florida employers prefer hiring vocationally and cooperatively trained high school alumni for entry-level jobs by an overwhelming majority, according to a survey of employer attitudes conducted by researchers at the University of North Florida. Systematic and random sampling procedures were applied to obtain the survey population of local employers from telephone-directory yellow pages, and out-of-town employers listed in the Florida Education Directory as advisors to industrial education, and Newspapers-in-Education programs.

Fifty percent of the surveyed employers prefer that secondary schools provide training in the fundamentals, such as work skills and habits, basic tool and machine nomenclature, essential manipulative and measurement skills, and necessary related theory. They also prefer that schools develop cooperative arrangements with business for advanced training. Another 44 percent said they prefer that the schools provide all training for entry-level jobs. Less than six percent indicated a preference for conducting entry-level job training themselves.

The researchers found a significant relationship between the size of the employing company and the preference for training. Responses from companies with less than 65 employees indicate that 75 percent of these employers prefer that schools provide all vocational training for entry-level jobs.

Based on the survey results, the researchers concluded that while large, and to some extent medium-size, companies prefer the delivery of vocational training in the cooperative mode, "small companies will continue to be dependent upon the public schools for vocational training for a significant period of time."

The Image of Vocational Education in Georgia: 1986

Increasing students' awareness of career opportunities, providing them with entry-level job skills, helping them develop an understanding of technology used in business and industry, and cultivating good work habits were the four most important contributions of vocational education in Georgia, according to an image study conducted by a private-sector consulting firm for the Georgia Council on Vocational Education. The consultants used a mail survey to obtain the opinions of over 2,700 employers, counselors, students, and parents of students throughout Georgia.

In addition to the commonalities mentioned above, the counselors and parents also thought that an important contribution of vocational education is that it encourages students to remain in school long enough to graduate. The employers were highly approving of the role of vocational education in improving training opportunities for the handicapped and providing retraining opportunities for adult workers. The students also emphasized the role of vocational education in developing leadership qualities.

High levels of agreement among all groups surveyed during the study were also found for two other assessments. Clear majorities of all the subject groups thought that vocational education programs should be offered in local high schools and not be restricted to area vocational-technical centers. They also agreed overwhelmingly that "if federal vocational education funds are reduced, the state should maintain the same level of current vocational education programs using state tax dollars."

When asked which areas of vocational education should receive the most increased emphasis, the greatest number of survey respondents said that increased emphasis should be directed toward: (1) developing students' basic skills; and (2) providing funds to keep vocational education programs current with changing technology.

The researchers, in analyzing the survey results, also made two other discoveries that could influence the direction of an attempt to enhance the public image of vocational education. They found that "Georgians living in non-metropolitan counties have a better image of vocational education than those who live in metropolitan counties." They also found that "Georgians who are more knowledgeable about vocational education tend to have a better image of it than those who are less familiar with vocational education."

REPORTING THE EFFORTS

Industry Services Training Program

The Industry Services Training Program for the Division of Vocational, Adult, and Community Education (DVACE), Florida Department of Education, is responsible for a major effort to enhance the image of vocational

technical education as an integral part of Florida's economic development strategy. In an interview with the Director of the Industry Services Training Program, it was noted that approximately 20 percent of the activities of Industry Services are directed toward bringing new industry to the state and 80 percent of Industry Services activities are directed toward improving the climate for expansion of industries already located in Florida.

Representatives of the Industry Services Training Program participate in a variety of promotional efforts designed to acquaint the business community with opportunities for worker training provided by Florida's educational system. Likewise, Industry Services personnel participate in guidance activities designed to acquaint the youth of the state with opportunities to obtain training in emerging technological occupations and to pursue careers that will also enhance Florida's economic development.

One of the major tools used by Industry Services to familiarize business and industry representatives with the ability of the DVACE and Florida's educational system to respond quickly and effectively to their needs for trained employees is a glossy magazine-size brochure entitled Florida: The Leader's Choice.

The brochure has proved to be a desirable public relations and industry recruiting tool. As such, it is being distributed not only by the Industry Services Training Program, but also by the Florida Department of Commerce and the Florida Chamber of Commerce. Consequently, it is currently being disseminated throughout the United States and to several foreign concerns.

The Sunshine State Skills Act

In 1985 the Florida Legislature passed the Sunshine State Skills Act. As explained by the Executive Director of the State Board of Community Colleges, this act was designed to bring together community colleges and employers who have specific training needs for employees in new, expanding, or diversifying businesses in Florida.

The legislature provided $50,000 for administration of the program and $700,000 for grants to institutions for providing instructional programs for current and future employer requirements. The act prohibits the use of these funds for equipment purchases and participating businesses were asked to match $700,000 on a dollar-for-dollar basis. The act also provided for the appointment of an advisory committee to review and recommend grant proposals.

According to the Executive Director, private businesses and community colleges are excited about this new program. It is unique in that it permits a working partnership between community colleges and businesses that favorably influences the Florida economy. Eleven community colleges received one or more of the grants and are working with businesses that range in size from small machine shops in Marianna to industrial giants such as ITT, Grumman, and McDonnell Douglas.

These programs are aimed directly at employers' needs during critical start-up or expansion periods. Also, the grants are competitive. The requirement that employers provide matching funds ensures careful scrutiny and assessment of a programs potential before it is actually "launched."

Training programs thus far approved include: mechanical assembly, computer training, secretarial/clerical/word processing, basic electricity, critical care nursing, pesticide use and safety, marketing, managerial skills, and culinary arts for hotel cooks.

The Entrepreneurship Initiative

Heeding the dictum of Calvin Coolidge that "the business of America is business," the vocational education community has set out to increase the role of vocational education in helping students of all ages prepare for careers as entrepreneurs. Three projects are currently in progress at the statewide level: (1) participation in a national entrepreneurship consortium; (2) VIMAS materials selection; and (3) career education project development.

(1) Florida is among the twenty-three states and one territory that have taken the lead in entrepreneurship education by joining together to form the National Entreprenuership Education Consortium, according to a report published in the February/March 1985 issue of the Florida Vocational Journal. Operated by the National Center for Research in Vocational Education (NCRVE) at Ohio State University, the consortium will serve as a focal point through which its members can interact with each other as well as with the NCRVE's supporting research community.

Members of the consortium receive such benefits as program support services and materials to foster state entrepreneurship education leadership, promotion of successful projects, a resource data base, an electronic newsletter, a referral service, and regularly scheduled meetings to enhance the interaction of the consortium membership.

(2) The Vocational Instructional Materials Acquisition System (VIMAS), operating under a grant from the Division of Vocational, Adult, and Community Education (DVACE), is currently conducting needs assessment and review/select procedures for competency-based instructional materials in entrepreneurship education. The materials which are selected by these procedures will then be distributed to marketing education instructors throughout Florida for use in courses in Business Management and Ownership.

(3) The Office of Career Education within the DVACE is undertaking a federally-funded project to advance the idea of entrepreneurship as a viable career option for the economically disadvantaged. Career Education personnel will be working toward program development, materials selection, and inservice activities to integrate entrepreneurship education into Florida's career education effort. Field testing of materials, programs, and inservice activities will be conducted in the target counties of Gadsden, Bay, and Escambia.

The Equity Campaign

The Equity Campaign is a current initiative of a consortium of seventeen educational institutions. Included in the list of consortium participants are six community and junior colleges, seven school districts, and four area vocational-technical centers which joined the consortium as individual entities. The consortium is coordinated by the equity specialist of the DVACE and has a twofold purpose. One major thrust of the campaign is to reach young people and adults, particularly displaced homemakers, the handicapped, and the disadvantaged, and to let them know that through vocational-technical education their career options are much more numerous than they may have realized, especially in nontraditional occupations. The other major thrust is aimed at prospective employers of vocational program graduates and is intended to dispel stereotypes about nontraditional job applicants.

The consortium is sponsoring the development of a dozen different types of information products for both statewide and local use. These products include recruitment pamphlets, in English and Spanish, localized multiprogram brochures, specific program area brochures, information pamphlets for prospective employers, recruitment posters, recruitment billboards, recruitment newspaper advertisements, recruitment radio and video public service announcements, informational videotape presentations, and informational slidetape presentations.

Florida Educational Information Service

The Florida Educational Information Service (FEIS) is a centralized resource center for Florida teachers, librarians, and administrators associated with vocational, occupational, and career education (Kindergarden-University). FEIS provides specific, comprehensive, individualized data searches that are the state's primary means of identifying curriculum research and evaluation materials for use in vocational programs. Searches are designed with the ultimate goals of avoiding costly duplication of time and effort and locating the most current resources and information.

Additionally, FEIS maintains the statewide vocational-technical educators mailing list. It is, therefore, crucial to any effort to disseminate educational information and materials statewide. Because DVACE funding enables FEIS to provide information services to Florida educators at no charge, it is an effective tool in the maintenance of the "leading edge" image that Florida's educational system is attempting to project.

Periodic Summaries of Topical Research

The periodic summaries are bimonthly memoranda recapping the findings of recent academic research, reported in the literature, dealing with topics relevant to the vocational education enterprise. Sent out under the signature of the DVACE Director, the periodic summaries are distributed to the members of the Florida Legislature, community college presidents, county superintendents, university teacher educators, and members of vocational, technical, community, and career education advisory committees.

The objective of the periodic summaries is to keep the influential individuals who compose the target population informed of the many benefits of vocational education that are revealed by the research published in the academic literature and/or presented at professional conferences. The thirty-three issues of the memoranda that have thus far been issued have related research findings on a wide variety of topics, such as the role of vocational education in the retention of potential dropouts; employability of vocational education graduates; the contribution of vocational education to economic productivity; the benefits and activities of vocational student organizations; vocational education and nontraditional occupations; employer satisfaction, expectations, and preferences; the advantages of competency-based instruction; the utility of computer-assisted instruction; basic skills improvement through vocational education; and the advantages of business/education partnerships.

Lifeline

Lifeline, a "newsletter of lifelong learning," is a quarterly publication of the Bureau of Adult and Community Education, Division of Vocational, Adult, and Community Education (DVACE), Florida Department of Education. Now in its third year of publication, with a circulation of approximately 2000, Lifeline provides Florida's adult and community educators with a means of exchanging program, curriculum, research, and conference information. Lifeline also serves as a means to chronicle the currently literacy campaign being conducted by the Department of Education.

The Florida Vocational Journal

The Florida Vocational Journal is described in the DVACE's Directory of Selected Projects Supported by the Division of Vocational, Adult, and Community Education as a means of helping "Florida's vocational educators provide high quality programs for all their students by publishing current information in newsbrief and article form on a wide variety of topics related to occupational training. Appearing six times a year, the Journal also serves as a forum, giving classroom teachers, teacher educators, advisers, and administrators a vehicle for information exchange."

In addition to Florida readership, the Journal has readers in almost every state and territory of the United States and in a half dozen foreign nations, and has a circulation of over 19,000.

In recent years The Florida Vocational Journal has received numerous awards from state and national media organizations for both its literary and artistic quality. Organizations that have honored the Journal include EDPRESS, the National Association of Vocational-Technical Communicators, and the Florida Magazine Association. Thus, the Journal, now in its twelfth year of publication, has been recognized as an effective tool for both public relations and informational exchange on behalf of vocational education in the State of Florida.

EXAMPLES FROM ELSEWHERE

Concerted Effort

Research indicates that the more people know about vocational education, the greater is their appreciation of it. An excellent model of informational/image campaign to enhance the public image of vocational education is provided by the experience of Communications Support Group, Inc., in their efforts to help the Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga Board of Cooperative Educational Services bolster the image of vocational education in upstate New York. Charles Brodhead, president of the corporation, detailed this successful operation in a presentation at the Dallas meeting of the American Vocational Association, in December 1986, and in a article published in the November/December 1984 issue of VocEd. This article was abstracted in the December 15, 1986 issue of the "Periodic Summary of Topical Research" as follows:

> A significant increase in vocational program enrollments, a ninety percent positive acceptance of vocational education as an 'important' curricular option, and sizeable donations of cash and in-kind awards for recognition of excellence among vocational education students by local employers and suppliers reflected the improvement of the image of vocational education in upstate New York following the implementation of a comprehensive image-improvement plan. The plan was launched with the help of the Communications Support Group, Inc., an Ithaca public relations firm, on behalf of the Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga Board of Cooperative Educational Services.
>
> The program was started with the creation of appropriate watchword--'VoPro'--and a slogan--'Be a VoPro--Learn to Earn!' With the slogan in hand, the New York vocational students, teachers, and administrators employed a variety of media to 'polish the image' of vocational education. First, they purchased radio time on both adult- and youth-oriented stations. Then, they obtained newspaper space and ran a series of 'VoPro Success Stories.' These stories were first-person accounts of vocational graduates who were putting their education to good use. Initial successes led to the production of more media and promotional items. A newsletter, VoPro News, and a brochure, The VoPro Guide, were created; VoPro calenders, memo pads, gift certificates, lapel buttons, hats, patches, and heat transfers were produced and distributed to keep the slogan in the public eye. The highlight of the program was an annual VoPro Fair featuring active, working displays of students and their work.
>
> The planners used enrollment figures, surveys, and contributions from the private sector to evaluate the success of their effort. The results were dramatic. Vocational enrollments shot up twenty percent. A telephone survey confirmed that the

> program had achieved widespread name recognition. A mail survey of every household in a medium-sized city school district 'indicated a ninety percent acceptance of vocational education as an "important" curricular offering for high school students.' Furthermore, within two years of the creation of an awards ceremony for vocational education students, 'cash and in-kind awards from local employers and suppliers exceeded $5,000.00.'
>
> In his analysis of the image-building program, the president of the Communications Support Group, Inc. concluded that 'we know that vocational education can solve its image problems. But its destiny is in its own hands. . . . There is no substitute for administrative and faculty enthusiasm, the commitment of reasonable financial resources, and the application of professional know-how.'

Brodhead's concluding remarks deserve reiteration. "There is no substitute for administrative and faculty enthusiasm, the commitment of reasonable financial resources, and the application of professional know-how."

In order to carry out a campaign such as that suggested by Brodhead, on a statewide basis, centralized planning and funding would be necessary. In theory, such functions would come under the purview of the public relations office of the Division of Vocational, Adult, and Community Education. However, no such office exists!

Programs for the Gifted and Talented

Another potential image-building tool that has been used with some success in Alabama and Hawaii is the initiation of vocational education for the gifted. By recruiting gifted students into technological training, and monitoring their success, at least two image-related objectives can be met:

1. Gifted students provide an antidote to the poisonous impression that vocational education is a "dumping ground."

2. Gifted students focus attention on the economic benefits that can be derived from vocational-technical preparation. Few indeed are the gifted students who want to grow up to be poor.

In an article published in the October/November issue of Na Po'e Hana, a newsletter of the Hawaii State Commission on Employment and Human Resources/State Council on Vocational Education, the subject of vocational education for the gifted is examined. In the article, entitled "Voc Ed Can Be for the 'Best and Brightest,'" Glenn Minami, an automotive technology instructor and chairman of the Industrial Arts Education Department at Kaiser High School, is reported to have observed that "having top students in a class helps to spur the achievement of all

students. Better students can help others with lesser academic or mechanical abilities. An important function of education is to motivate students to perform to their full potential."

By creating a challenging auto mechanics program that attracted talented students, Minami was able to demonstrate two additional, image-related advantages of vocational education programs for the gifted:

3. vocational education can also teach "academic" skills; and

4. such programs improve the image of vocational education among the "academic" faculty.

"For example," the article continues, "a student can learn the practical applications of science and mathematics through automotive technology. At Kaiser High School, the mathematics and science teachers often refer students to the program and are its biggest boosters. Minami points out that all high schools have bright and able students who can be attracted to vocational courses if they are challenged enough and given tough assignments."

"As a member of the State Council on Vocational Education," the article concludes, "Minami shares the belief that improving the image of vocational education should be a high priority. And he believes that the best way to improve that image is to boost vocational education's quality and the caliber of students it attracts."

Educational innovators in Alabama also have been introducing vocational education programs for gifted and talented students with admirable success. The intention of the program designers, according to a report published in the September, 1985 issue of Open Entries, was to provide instructional programs that "would be particularly useful for talented students who will have to earn their own money for postsecondary education." Excerpts of the report follow:

> Talent and technology in a self-paced learning environment formed the winning combination this past year for pilot Drafting and Electronics programs aimed at gifted students in Alabama's secondary schools.
>
> Participating students as Bessemer City Area Vocational Center and Morgan County's Bessemer Comprehensive High School were able to progress as quickly as they could through dozens of learning modules--on flexible schedules of three-, two-, or one-hour blocks of instructional time. During this accelerated training, they had the opportunity to apply related academic skills, acquire marketable technical skills, and better prepare realistic plans for higher education . . . . Almost all of the graduating seniors who participated are going on to further schooling; a few decided to head directly for full-time employment.

Materials for the pilot sites cover some of the more advanced skills of the two technical fields.

Success of these two programs has prompted state officials to try similar approaches this year in training related to Electricity and Health Care.

CONCLUSIONS

Since the findings of studies included here reveal that the image of vocational education is brightest among rural populations and those most familiar with vocational education (e.g., students who have participated in vocational education and their parents, teachers, and employers), it may be concluded that efforts to improve the image of vocational education should be directed toward the target population of urban residents and those who lack personal familiarity with the vocational education enterprise (e.g., students who have not participated in vocational education programs as well as their parents, teachers, and employers).

Furthermore, since the image-improvement efforts of educators in New York, Hawaii, and Alabama have met with considerable success, it may be concluded that a concerted public relations effort can result in a significant improvement in the image of vocational education among the general public and that vocational education programs for gifted and talented students can result in an improvement of the image of vocational education in that they (a) help dispel the notion of vocational education as a "dumping ground," (b) focus attention on the economic benefits of vocational-technical education, (c) expand the provision of basic and academic skills application through vocational-technical education, and (d) burnish the image of vocational-technical education held by nonvocational faculty members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to enhance the public image of vocational-technical education in Florida, the Florida Council on Vocational Education makes the following recomendations to the State Board for Vocational Education.

1. Establish and fund a concerted, statewide public relations program, with centralized leadership, to enhance the image of vocational education among the general population by informing them of the significant attainments of the vocational education system in Florida and of the successes of vocational students who have participated.

2. Develop, implement, and publicize vocational education programs designed to attract and challenge gifted and talented students.

3. Encourage personnel of the Industry Services Training Program to continue participation in guidance activities designed to acquaint young people with the range of emerging technological occupations and

the challenges and rewards, particularly financial rewards, of those occupations and that participation in guidance activities be expanded to include audiences of elementary and middle school students as well as students in Florida's high schools.

4. Encourage the Division of Vocational, Adult, and Community Education and the Division of Community Colleges to continue their current efforts (e.g., the Industry Services Training Program, the Sunshine State Skills Act programs, the Entrepreneurship Initiative, the Equity Campaign, the Florida Educational Information Service, the Periodic Summaries of Topical Research, Lifeline, and the Florida Vocational Journal) to enhance the image of vocational education in Florida.

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